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The role of classroom observation in the development and assessment of schoolteachers in Vietnam: a review of national policy and research

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the role of classroom observation in the development and assessment of schoolteachers in Vietnam through a narrative review of current policy and cognate research literature. The overall aim of this review was twofold. Firstly, to contribute to a growing bank of Vietnam-based studies to maximise the value of the insights from this scholarly work into recent policy reforms on teachers' professional development in Vietnam. Secondly, to widen access and exposure to published work on the topic in Vietnamese that is not readily accessible to English-speaking scholars. This review revealed a long history and engrained culture of using observation as a teacher performance evaluation tool. In recent years, there have been policy reforms and research studies that have repositioned observation as a tool for teacher learning and development. However, the implementation of these reforms has been inconsistent across Vietnam, along with recent reform having encountered resistance from a culture of compliance in schools. This paper identifies some of the key issues that policy makers and educational leaders need to address in practice in order to ensure the effective and meaningful implementation of the reforms relating to the use of observation for learning and developmental purposes.

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Introduction

This paper emerged as an output from one of six collaborative research projects that were part of the research development and innovation strand of a wider teacher education project funded by the World Bank in Vietnam. The project involved a collaboration between a group of experienced teacher education researchers from Middle England University in the UK and a group of teacher educators and post-doctoral researchers from a range of universities across Vietnam. The project included two distinct phases: 1)

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a narrative review of current policy and cognate research literature and 2) qualitative data collection involving educators from a range of secondary schools across four provinces in Vietnam. This paper focuses exclusively on the first phase of the project.

As is the case in many educational contexts globally, classroom observation has traditionally been the dominant method used for monitoring, assessing and supporting teacher development in Vietnamese schools (Tsukui, 2018). This project set out to investigate the use and impact of current approaches to classroom observation on teachers in primary and secondary schools in Vietnam. In recent years, teacher professional development (PD) policies and the use of classroom observation in Vietnam have undergone substantial development. While a number of research studies have focused on examining and evaluating the use of classroom observation for teacher PD, these studies have mainly focused on the methods and practices of observation, with little attention given to the interrelationship between policy and practice. During the early stage of this project, we identified a gap in the associated literature of reviews that bring together Vietnam-based research on classroom observation for teacher PD and link these research studies to research on the wider teacher PD practices, policy and culture. In other words, our review of Vietnam-based research studies on observation and government policy on the use of observation for PD revealed a lack of synthesis between these two bodies of work, implying that not only did the two exist in isolation from one another, but that one failed to inform the other. This paper therefore aims to address this gap and take advantage of what we perceive as a missed opportunity by bringing these bodies of work together in a single paper that provides a discussion on the situated use of classroom observation in the context of wider teacher PD practices, policy and culture in Vietnam. Another reason for us wanting to combine these bodies of work in an academic paper for public dissemination was the recognition that some of the published work in Vietnamese that is not readily accessible to English-speaking scholars.

Undertaking the literature review

The project team comprised four post-doctoral researchers from Vietnam and two experienced researchers from the UK who had an established track record in researching and writing about observation in the context of teacher education and PD in the UK and internationally. As our wider project aimed to conduct original research into the use of observation for teacher education in Vietnam, with a view to contributing to current knowledge and practice in the field for both Vietnamese and international audiences, we felt that it was fundamental to draw on literature published in Vietnamese as well as English. In the case of the former, our discussions revealed a growing bank of teacher education literature published in Vietnamese, which could make an original contribution to developing an authentic, locally situated understanding of current policies, practices and research on the use of observation for teacher education. We anticipated that this understanding would also help to inform our research project's design in the second phase of the project to ensure its authenticity and meaningfulness to teachers, teacher educators, school leaders and policymakers in Vietnam.

Drawing on literature published in both languages enabled us to create a sense of complementarity, which in turn helped us to enhance the rigour of this literature review and that of our subsequent research project design, which was shaped by the findings

and analysis from this review. The team agreed to use the search engines available at our respective universities in order to undertake the review. As several of the Vietnamese researchers had a competent level of fluency and understanding of English, they agreed to search both Vietnamese and English publications, while the UK-based researchers limited their search to publications in English. The key terms agreed for conducting the literature search included: classroom/lesson observation, lesson study, teacher education/professional development in Vietnam, Vietnamese schools.

Researchers from the project team were allocated specific areas to search and review the relevant literature in pairs/trios based on their research backgrounds and professional experiences. Each pair/trio consisted of one researcher from the UK and one or more researchers from Vietnam. This collaborative division of labour and pairing of experienced/new researchers not only embodied the ethos of the project but was also a fundamental element in ensuring that we were able to fulfil one of the project's key aims of supporting the development of the Vietnamese researchers. As some of the Vietnamese researchers were new to conducting educational research, the UK-based researchers acted as mentors in supporting them to undertake the literature review. Two specific areas emerged from our final discussions which we have used to structure the main contents of this review:

- Vietnam-based scholarly research on the PD of schoolteachers and the practice of observation
- Government policy on teachers' PD and the role of observation

Vietnam-based research on the professional development of schoolteachers and the role of observation

Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) recently identified teachers' PD as a key driver in improving the quality of teaching and student learning outcomes (MOET, 2018a), with an emphasis on teachers investing in and evidencing their ongoing PD as a means of meeting the demands of the general education curriculum introduced nationally in 2018 (DeJaeghere et al., 2021; Tran, Do Thi, et al., 2020). Recent research on the PD of schoolteachers in Vietnam has focused principally on two specific issues. Firstly, evaluating the quality and effectiveness of teachers' PD (Hoang et al., 2021; Dinh & Doan, 2019; Hoang & Khong, 2021; Phan et al., 2021; Tran & Nguyen Thi, 2019; Tran et al., 2018; Tran, Do Thi, et al., 2020). Secondly, exploring the implementation of different models of PD and their impact on practice (Hoang & Khong, 2021; Nam et al., 2015; Saito & Khong, 2017; Son & Duan, 2010; Tsukui, 2018).

Vietnamese teachers participate in a range of PD, from school-based activities to provincial and/or national training courses, though the content and focus of much of this activity is heavily centralised and determined by the MOET, the Provincial Education and Training Service Department (PETS) and District Education and Training Service Department (DETS). Training courses and workshops tend to focus mainly on subject content/knowledge and are typically delivered didactically in the form of large lectures with little evidence of PD provision focusing on the practical application of this content in the classroom, according to recent studies (Dinh & Doan, 2019; Tran & Nguyen Thi, 2019; Tran, Do Thi, et al., 2020). In short,

these studies have highlighted a theory-practice disconnection between the approach adopted in the delivery of these courses/workshops and the needs of those teachers attending them. As these events are typically attended by mass audiences and the time available for demonstration and practice is extremely limited, it is important to acknowledge that logistical restrictions contribute to this situation. However, evidence to date suggests that there is little variation in the delivery of these events, which would imply that the disconnection is a systemic rather than a localised issue.

The most common school-based PD activities include classroom visits, professional meetings for lesson study/learning community, self-reflection, coaching and mentoring. These activities are among those acknowledged by principals and teachers as having the most tangible impact on teaching practice (Dinh & Doan, 2019; Tran & Nguyen Thi, 2019; Tran, Do Thi, et al., 2020). According to (Truong et al., 2021), classroom observation is the most popular form of teacher learning in schools. Tran and Nguyen Thi's (2019) research revealed a consensus between teachers and principals that observing others and being observed was considered one of the most important forms of PD for teachers to engage in, as it provides a source of reciprocal peer learning in terms of acquiring new subject knowledge and pedagogic skills. However, other studies have suggested that the demands on teachers' time to engage with PD are excessive. For example Truong et al. (2021), argue that these demands have led to observation becoming bureaucratically formalised and increasingly perceived as a perfunctory tool with some teachers going through the motions when observing their peers so as to comply with accountability demands rather than engaging with it meaningfully as a worthwhile PD opportunity. This argument chimes with critiques of observation in other countries where the overreliance on assessment-based models of observation has led to the hegemony of observation as a performative tool and its subsequent dilution as a catalyst for professional learning to develop teachers' pedagogic thinking and practice (e.g O'Leary, 2020).

Tran and Nguyen Thi (2019) found that observations were often earmarked as showcasing events for special occasions such as the Communist Party's Birthday, Vietnamese Teachers' Day or International Women's Day, instead of occurring as part of ongoing PD across the school year. The longstanding "good teacher competitions" that are held across Vietnam at school, city/district and province level appear to be instrumental in promoting a culture of performance-based observations. Tsukui (2018) revealed that these annual teacher competitions were little more than showboating scenarios for those teachers that participated as the assessors focused largely on the teachers' performance rather than the students' learning. Similarly Truong et al. (2021) found that the primary focus of the observations in these competitions was on teaching and the achievements of the teacher. Tran and Nguyen Thi's (2019) research also found that it was common for the same lessons to be repeated, thus suggesting that "rehearsed" or "showcase" lessons were being used on such occasions, which is a common problem with performance-based models of observation where the stakes are often high, as other researchers have identified elsewhere (e.g O'Leary, 2020). Besides, the evaluation criteria for these competitions have always depended heavily on the observer's subjective judgements. Arguably, such experience prompted Vietnam's MOET to revise its criteria for the assessment of teachers' practice.

Table 1. Domains and criteria for observation of teaching and learning.

Domain	Criteria
1. Planning teaching and resources (Curriculum and resources)	Relevance of learning activities and lesson objectives, content and teaching methods. Clarity of objectives, content, teaching techniques and student outcomes for each learning activity Relevance of teaching resources and material used in organising learning activities Relevance of student outcome assessment and evaluation plan
2. Organising learning activities	Students' attention to teaching methods and how the teacher assigns the learning tasks The ability to observe, follow and determine students' difficulties Relevance and effectiveness of supporting and motivating students to collaborate and support others in the class Effectiveness of learning outcomes assessment and analysis.
3. Student behaviours	Students' ability to receive and prepare to fulfil learning assignments in class Student positivity, engagement and collaboration in fulfilling learning assignments Students' positive participation in presenting and discussing learning outcomes. Accuracy, correction and relevance of learning outcomes

New standards for lesson evaluation were recently created, which include twelve criteria (MOET, 2020, see Table 1 below). These new standards are now purportedly more concerned with student learning activities, though there is still a noticeable focus on how the teacher performs within a given scenario in the evaluation criteria, as evidenced in related studies. For example Hoang et al. (2021), revealed that observation in Vietnamese schools often focuses on assessing the teacher's subject knowledge and teaching skills. The result is that the post-observation discussion is more evaluative of the individual teacher's classroom performance and subject competence rather than reflecting on the students' learning. In the case of beginner teachers observing more senior colleagues, the post-observation discussion can be an uncomfortable experience as the cultural hierarchies prevalent in Vietnamese culture have an overarching influence that make it difficult for them to comment openly on their teaching. Beginner teachers are expected to respect the views and practices of their more experienced, senior colleagues by listening attentively and conforming to their advice. In other words, social norms give rise to the notion of "expected" rather than "earned" respect based on seniority, which means that challenging their authority can be problematic as it can be considered disrespectful.

Supportive leadership and collegial trust have been identified by some researchers as fundamental elements in creating the conditions for teachers' professional learning to flourish. Studies by Hoang and Khong (2021), Phan et al. (2021) and Tran, Do Thi, et al. (2020) have all highlighted the importance of supportive leadership and trust. Tran et al. (2018) maintain that collaboration in professional learning is key to high-quality teacher learning but is dependent on the active support of school leaders at every level (i.e., principals, middle leaders and teacher leaders). However, in Hoang & Khong's (2021) study, many of the activities that foster the development of such working cultures were largely informal, which can make it difficult to implement across schools under a centralised system, as is the case with the way in which PD is predominantly managed in Vietnam. In Tran et al. (2018) study, those principals who facilitated the organisation and promotion of these activities regularly took part in these activities themselves, which was a crucial factor in getting buy-in from the school's teachers and helped to increase motivation among staff. Tran et al. (2020) found that although the MOET, PETS and DETS

set the guidelines and principles for teacher education and development, individual schools have a degree of autonomy to implement specific initiatives, strategies and approaches. While the centralised policy diktat emphasises the importance of developing professional learning communities, it is individual schools and their leaders who are the key drivers in operationalising the policy. This emerged as a common theme across our review, suggesting that while there may be clarity in articulating policy aims and objectives in official documentation, the resources and support systems required to implement policy into practice were less clear. Thus, it would suggest a gap between policy and practice, a key issue that will be discussed in more detail in the final section of this paper.

The Japanese model of lesson study has had a significant influence on observation policy and practice in Vietnam in recent years. Lesson study is a form of teacher PD activity originating in Japan in the nineteenth century. It is based on a cyclical model of PD that typically involves a number of stages as part of the cycle. The participating teachers come together to collaboratively identify and agree on an element of learning that their students find challenging. They then work collaboratively to plan a “research lesson” that is designed to help their students to overcome the agreed learning challenge(s). One member of the group then teaches the lesson while the other teachers observe selected students during the lesson rather than the teacher. This is then followed by a post-lesson debrief meeting in which the group share their reflections on the evidence gathered about the students’ learning behaviours and consider the implications for further work on dealing with the challenge(s) to maximise the effectiveness of their students’ learning. (e.g Lewis et al., 2006). A variation on lesson study known as “lesson study for learning community” (LSLC) was developed in Japan, emphasising lesson observation and participatory reflection by teachers through professional teacher meetings. LSLC was introduced in Vietnam in 2006 and has since come to be regarded as an effective intervention for developing teacher-learning communities (Saito et al., 2012).

As part of a research project funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency, lesson study was first introduced on an in-service teacher training programme in the Bac Giang Province in Vietnam in 2006 (Saito et al., 2008). The project focused on developing classroom observation and teacher reflection skills through a series of professional teacher meetings. The researchers faced several challenges in promoting joint classroom observation and reflective practice during the project. One of the biggest challenges was getting teachers to move beyond their engagement with observation as an evaluative tool for judging their colleagues’ teaching and students’ work and instead to use it as a means of sharing their thinking about practice and developing empathy and compassion. Encouraging dialogic interaction among teachers in the project also proved challenging. These challenges are illustrative of a deeper epistemological and methodological divide between the principles underpinning a model like lesson study and the way in which observation is conceptualised in the Vietnamese education system, an issue explored further in the final section of this paper.

Professional learning communities were set up in secondary schools in Vietnam to promote teachers’ professional learning through reflective practice with their colleagues. As a result, mutual observation of teaching practice has since become an integral part of teachers’ professional learning in Vietnam, though the extent to which the principles of such practice have been fully embraced and adopted remains contested. There are also issues relating to the sustainability of lesson study in Vietnamese schools and to what

extent its current implementation enables schools to build pathways for teachers' PD, as others have argued in their research (e.g. Lim et al., 2011). In a case study on teachers' professional learning in the Bac Giang province of Vietnam Saito and Khong (2017) found that providing teachers with audio-visual resources such as video recordings of their own and/or other teachers' classroom practice could be useful for helping them to reflect on their practice through LSLC. These resources were a powerful tool in supporting teachers to notice learning points in their practice and video-reflection helped them to identify and address difficulties in their classroom practice. According to Saito and Khong (2017) the regular recording of student learning and daily reflections by teachers after reviewing recordings made a critical difference to how teachers approached observation, reflection and their own PD, particularly in the primary sector. However, in the context of secondary schools, classroom observation still seems to be driven by an accountability agenda in Vietnam. Research by Hallinger et al. (2021) revealed that many teachers did not want to be observed, felt nervous and lacked confidence when other teachers entered their classrooms, especially senior teachers or the principal. This suggests that classroom observation is still primarily a tool for assessing and grading teacher performance, rather than a collaborative tool of inquiry to explore teaching and learning.

To further explore the issue of PD through classroom observation Tsukui et al. (2017), used a grounded theory approach to investigate the values and characteristics of teacher observations in order to understand student learning in Vietnam. The study used a unique data collection method based on teacher presentations that described and illustrated events that took place during lessons, using digital images they had produced themselves. Tsukui et al. (2017) identified what they labelled as the "compliance-with-a-plan" value as a major barrier to Vietnamese teachers' ability to embrace the value of observation as a tool of "exploration" for teacher learning. For Tsukui et al. (2017) this "compliance-with-a-plan" restricted teachers from engaging with observation as a lens through which to interpret what is happening in each teaching situation in relation to unique personalities and events. In short, their study highlighted the importance of how when a teacher engages in the act of observation, this involves a dialogue between the act of seeing and their underlying values. Tsukui et al. (2017) recommended that the PD of expertise in teaching should focus not on the way in which teachers link knowledge but on how they reflect on and break the cycle of "compliance-with-a-plan" thinking.

Government policy on teachers' professional development and the role of observation

The following section provides a brief synopsis of some of the key education policy reforms and accompanying documentation with a view to enabling the reader to situate the discussion from the previous section and to understand the national, provincial and local contexts in which these reforms occur. Due to the scope of this paper, discussion is limited to the context of secondary schools.

The creation and implementation of education policy in Vietnam operates on three levels. At a macro level, the MOET is responsible for creating national policy. At a meso level, the Department of Education and Training in each province interprets this national policy according to its local contexts and subsequently creates a tailor-made policy document for all secondary schools within its province. For this reason, variations can

occur across different provinces. At a micro level, each school uses the policy document produced in its province as the central point of reference on which to base its implementation of the policy.

National education policy in Vietnam acknowledges observation as an essential tool to support teachers' PD and assess teacher performance. Two key government policy documents published in recent years by the MOET reinforce this policy position: 1) No. 5555/BGDĐT-GDTrH (MOET, 2014), published in October 2014 and 2) Circular No. 20/2018/TT-BGDĐT (MOET, 2018a), published in August 2018. Both of these policies form part of the Vietnamese government's 2018 General Education Programme (MOET, 2018b) and highlight the two main dimensions to its use of classroom observation in secondary schools and further education.

MOET (2014) provides national guidelines for organising and governing teachers' PD in secondary schools and further education through a virtual platform known as "School Connection." The three priority areas of focus for teachers' PD include: 1) the innovation of teaching methods; 2) standardised teacher assessment; and 3) the assessment of student outcomes. This national policy document was produced as a guide to support secondary schools and further education institutions to implement innovative teaching methods and assess the quality of teaching and learning. As part of a wider national reform programme to increase innovation in secondary education in Vietnam, schoolteachers and leaders are required to identify topics from each curriculum subject, demonstrate their competence in delivering these topics and evidence this online via the School Connection platform. After completing an online PD course, each subject department or "professional group" in a school is required to identify at least two teaching topics to focus on for each school semester and for the selected classes to be observed as part of a lesson study cycle. After completing the cycles, teachers have to upload the accompanying documentation and outcomes to the School Connection website. However, who views this documentation and how it feeds back into the lesson study cycle is unclear, as too is the wider role of this website in contributing to the PD of teachers.

The MOET's (2014) policy foregrounds students as the principal focus of classroom observation, as evidenced by the priority areas mentioned such as completion of learning tasks, reporting on and discussing students' performance on assignments and assessment of their learning outcomes. This would appear to reflect the wider influence of lesson study as a model of observation and the shift in focus of observation away from teacher performance and onto student learning. Notwithstanding this, the policy extends the focus of lesson study beyond students by including aspects of teachers' practice such as organising, assessing and orienting learning activities. Recently, MOET released the accompanying document (2020) to MOET's (2014) policy that provides a list of the domains and criteria for teachers and their observers (Table 1), which is meant to be used as a central point of reference for guiding the note-taking and collaborative discussions of teachers' taught classes when collaborating in their subject departments or "professional groups."

The second key document that informs national education policy in Vietnam is Circular No. 20/2018/TT-BGDĐT, published by the MOET in August 2018 (MOET, 2018a). This document provides guidance on what it refers to as the standardised assessment of teachers' classroom practice against the Professional Standards for Secondary School Teachers, which comprise five domains and fifteen criteria. One of the domains assessed

is PD. The two primary sources of evidence used to inform the assessment of teachers in the PD domain are teaching plans and classroom observation. The PD domain requires teachers to demonstrate at least a rating of “competent/good” at subject expertise, knowledge, practical skills and PD that fulfils the requirements of educational innovation. In terms of rating, teachers’ classroom performance is assessed against a 4-point scale: 1) fail; 2) developing/pass; 3) competent/good and 4) exemplary/excellent. The PD domain plays a vital role in teachers’ final rating, as they must score competent/good in all criteria of this domain to be assessed as competent/good overall. Teachers who are assessed as competent/good or exemplary/excellent overall and satisfy all criteria of the PD domain as exemplary/excellent are classified as core/key teachers (i.e., an experienced teacher who acts as a mentor).

Classroom observation is also an important element of initial teacher education (ITE) in Vietnam. Most ITE programmes in Vietnam offer one semester of observation internship (4 weeks) and one semester of teaching internship (8 weeks). During the observation internship, student teachers have to observe seven lessons taught by a “core” teacher and compile a series of reports. They are encouraged to focus on the observed teacher’s teaching activities and student learning. After each observed lesson taught by a core teacher, there is a reflection session, which involves core teachers and student teachers (e.g. HUEdu, 2017). During their teaching internship, student teachers have to teach six lessons, all of which are observed and evaluated by a core teacher in their secondary school placement.

Following on from this, the mentoring of beginner teachers is considered a fundamental part of their induction into the teaching profession as it supports their PD. Government policy (MOET, 2016) stipulates that the probationary period for new secondary teachers is nine months, although it does not specify the specific content of the mentoring, instead leaving it to the discretion of mentors. During the probationary period, the beginner teacher works with a core teacher as their mentor, usually a subject department leader. Each beginner teacher undergoes two assessed observations of their teaching during their probationary period. These two classroom observations are evaluated by their mentor and the outcomes of these evaluations inform the school leader’s decision to sign off or continue the teacher’s probation. Interestingly though, there is a lack of specific detail in the policy documentation on the nature of support expected for beginner teachers, along with their roles and those of their mentors during the probationary period. This inevitably means that experiences are likely to differ considerably. It is difficult to measure the effectiveness and/or quality of these experiences as there is a lack of quality assurance mechanisms in place to regulate this probationary work across provinces.

In summary, there are tensions and contradictions between recent education policy reform in Vietnam about the practice and role of observation, which reflect competing agendas. On the one hand, it recognises the value of observation as a tool for teacher development and for gaining greater insights into the student learning experience through the adoption of lesson study as the preferred approach. On the other hand, the professional standards continue to reinforce the longstanding dependence on observation as a method of assessment of teachers’ classroom performance. Although current policy reform appears to have shifted the emphasis onto students’ classroom behaviour, their learning experience and outcomes, the extent to which this shift has been interpreted and enacted uniformly across the country

remains contested, with experiences differing across provinces. For example, Hanoi's Department of Education and Training produced a province-wide policy on lesson study in 2014, providing schools in the province with guidance on its role in the PD of secondary school teachers. Thus, Hanoi's adoption of lesson study as their preferred model of observation for supporting teachers' PD has prioritised collaboration and teacher learning, with student learning being the key driver for the focus of observation. In contrast, in the central province of Kon Tum, a more conventional, assessment-based approach to observation has been prioritised, with a focus on evaluating and grading teachers' classroom performance.

Discussion and concluding comments

Our review reveals that the dominant conceptualisation and application of classroom observation in the Vietnamese education system is as a tool for evaluating and ranking teacher performance; a position which has become normalised over a period of many years. This is in no way peculiar to Vietnam but reflects the history of the use of observation in schools worldwide for several decades (e.g O'Leary, 2020). Transforming such normalised thinking and practice inevitably takes time, along with the buy-in of all relevant stakeholders. The policy reform introduced by the Vietnamese MOET over the last decade and the adoption of lesson study in schools as an alternative approach to conceptualising and employing observation as a method suggests an acknowledgement of the limitations of performative models, as well as a desire to move beyond them. However, as this literature review has revealed, an epistemological and methodological divide currently exists between the principles underpinning collaborative, developmental models like lesson study and the continued reliance on judgemental, evaluative approaches to observation. This is partly due to the latter having become engrained practice, exacerbated by cultural orthodoxy. It is also indicative of a systemic policy-practice disconnection between the articulation of the rationale and aims of recent policy reform and the lack of an accompanying strategy that provides guidance on the concrete implications for ensuring the effective enactment of such reform. One of the counter-productive consequences of such disconnection is that it can lead to what (Wood, 2017) refers to as "zombie innovation," the process by which policymakers and senior leaders prescribe change agendas remotely but which ultimately fail to have a tangible impact on applied practice. This is largely because the educators who are tasked with having to adopt this new policy are rarely involved in its creation and thus have no sense of ownership. As a result, there can be a tendency for them to subvert and minimise change while engaging in a process of strategic compliance whereby they give the impression that they have fully adopted the change but, in reality, continue with their established practice. As Tsukui et al. (2017) discovered in their research, the notion of compliance is an engrained value that can act as a barrier to Vietnamese teachers engaging with alternative ways of thinking about and engaging with observation for their PD.

One of the biggest challenges currently facing Vietnamese schools concerns the provision of appropriate support to empower teachers and leaders to move beyond their engagement with observation as an evaluative tool and to make the transition to reconceptualising it as a lens for educational inquiry to drive teacher development. As others have found in their research, the transition to reconceptualising observation as a tool for supporting rather than sorting teachers

can be a significant paradigm shift that does not happen overnight but requires a sustained commitment and investment in skills development (e.g. O’Leary & Cui, 2020; O’Leary & Savage, 2020). An additional challenge concerns the switch in focus away from teacher performance to students’ learning. Not only does such change require a shift in how teachers and leaders conceptualise observation but also the way in which they interact with each other through the medium of observation (e.g. Cajkler & Wood, 2016). In order to break down some of the barriers associated with the historical use of observation and engrained hierarchies that can limit collaboration, school leaders need to lead by example by creating a culture of support and collegial trust whereby opportunities for teachers to reflect collaboratively on teaching and learning are both encouraged and facilitated (e.g. Day & Sammons, 2014). This is a priority if schools are to deal with the reluctance and guardedness felt by some teachers towards opening up their classrooms and their practice to the eyes of others, and ultimately creating the conditions for professional learning to flourish. But in order for such cultural change to occur, there needs to be an investment on a national scale in training and developing the necessary skills among educators that will enable them to bridge the current gap between policy and practice.

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